COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN

NEWS RELEASE

Study Shows Davis' Battle for Information Security Is Far From Over

GAO finds testing lacking, guidelines hard to follow

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Laptop computers issued to employees of federal agencies then never again accounted for continue to make news. But, according to a new study from the Government Accountability Office, it's not just hardware that continues to pose a security threat but systems as well.

The study, requested by Rep. Tom Davis, R-Va., chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform, after several accounts of government data breaches, found agencies' security programs lacking in several key areas. In its study of 24 major agencies, GAO found that many did not address key elements for effective testing, such as determining how thoroughly to test certain elements according to risk, testing security controls common to multiple systems, defining duties of those performing the tests and performing them enough.

GAO took a closer look at six agencies and found they did not sufficiently document their test methods and results, define assessment methods, test their controls or determine whether previously reported problems had been addressed.

Agencies are required to take a variety of steps to ensure the security of data held by the government and to test these measures for effectiveness by the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA), which Davis authored and shepherded to passage in 2002. The GAO noted in its study that many had made a good-faith effort to improve on the FISMA report cards they receive in February or March each year.

The biggest need now, according to the GAO, is for improved guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which is charged in the legislation with establishing guidelines for information security within by government agencies.

"What this shows is that we have a long way to go to ensure Americans the information their government keeps about them is safe," said Davis. "We're going to do this, but it's going to take time."

It is unclear whether the committee will hold a hearing to discuss the findings.

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